DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 420 CG 007 914

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TITLE Adolescent Competence and Educational Ambition (plus Supplement).
PUB DATE Mar 73
NOTE 46p.; Paper presented at the annual American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 25-March 1, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Ability; *Academic Achievement; *Adolescence; *Adolescents; Aspiration; Classroom Research; Educational Background; *Educational Environment; Expectation; Individual Development; Performance; Research Projects; Social Influences

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the skills and competencies which give students the opportunity to act effectively in social situations in relation to a student's view of self as competent, thus enabling him to take advantage of his opportunities. The sample was drawn from all 14 and 15 year olds attending state secondary schools in the State of Victoria, Australia, during 1971. The results indicate that an adolescent's view of his own competence, already developed on the basis of past life experience, does affect the ordering of variables that might explain educational expectations. The author contends that these findings alter not only the potential effect of "objective" resources as traditionally used in research on this topic, but also the potential effect of these particular value-orientations in dampening or enhancing education ambitions. (Author/SES)

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# Adolescent Competence and Educational Ambition

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CG 007 914

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Paper delivered at A.E.R.A. Annual Conference,
New Orleans, February 25 - March 1, 1973.

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The Home, the School and the Child

In a recent book on American family and school relationships, Professor Christopher Jencks argues that schools alone can never break through the inequalities that exist in society. He attacks the liberal myth that education is the only, or even the main way up the status ladder. School buildings, a higher budget, the curriculum, even the characteristics of teachers are either secondary or irrelevant. What accounts most for educational achievement is the characteristics of the children themselves. Jencks argues moreover that intelligence, family background, environment and even academic success are only marginal in determining the child's eventual occupational income and prestige.

This is pretty strong stuff, because it challenges our usual assumptions about the home and the school. Typically, teachers blame parents and poor home background for the inability of children to learn. Lack of books, lack of parental interest and encouragement, indifference to the school and the teachers' efforts are seen as a vicious circle which can rarely be broken. The teacher tries but it is a pointless struggle. Parents in turn blame the school. Poor buildings, lack

of equipment and libraries, unqualified teachers, a useless academic curriculum reinforce the inequalities of society.

What has to be realized is that both viewpoints are equally naive and that we need instead a new interpretation of school in relation to community. We have to stop seeing schools as the answer to society's ills and start demanding wider changes in society itself. And we have to stop thinking in quantitative terms, counting dollars spent, books provided, teacher-pupil ratios, and instead re-examine the quality of parent-teacher-pupil relationships. As Jencks points out, spending more money on buildings, laboratories and facilities or even rewriting the curriculum seldom changes the way teachers and students actually treat each other minute by minute, and, even when schools do exert an unusual influence on children it just does not last until adulthood.

If we are to talk about home-school relations, about parent and teacher influences on learning, it seems vital that we adopt a process orientation, a dialectical view of the interplay between individual and society. Our model must be a dynamic, not a static one, one which attempts to explain the conflict that characterizes

reality-construction in the classroom. From a sociology of knowledge perspective, home-school relations should be seen as part of the wider problem of explaining the social distribution of knowledge (and its inverse, the social distribution of ignorance and uncertainty). Central to any such explanation will be the dynamics of power within our society and what can be called the parallel dynamics of submission or dependency.

Put simply, the relation between school and wider societal processes can be seen as follows.

(a) Resources (physical, economic, intellectual and political) are unevenly spread throughout society. There is a certain core of "recipe knowledge", the sum of "what everybody knows" about the social world part of which is a knowledge of the limits for action of different social groups (the poor can't expect to live in a wealthy suburb). There is also a stock of role-specific knowledge, distributed unevenly throughout society according to the limits of one's objective situation. The ghetto boy may know how to survive in a street fight, but he does not know how to handle polite conversation with middle class adults. The division of labor means too that some knowledge (what the doctor, the lawyer, the boiler stoker knows) is relevant only to those performing those specific roles.

(b) Power is involved because power implies the ability to decide who will be given access to physical resources, to how much money, recipe knowledge etc. and who will be denied access, especially to certain forms of role-specific knowledge. Since there are conflicting definitions of "reality" (the businessman compared with the process worker; the religious versus the atheist; the communist versus the capitalist; the hippie versus the square) the outcome of their confrontation rests on relative power: whose particular view of reality will be "made to stick" in the society?

(c) Resources are translated, in social interaction, into forms of <u>competence.</u>

(i) what can be called differential "<u>equipment for competence</u>", or those capacities necessary for the adequate performance of one's roles in society. These are individual-level skills such as academic competence, political competence, physical competence, sexual competence or specific forms of occupational competence, but they are, largely, socially defined. That is, certain resources and forms of competence are more highly valued than others by those who

control central social institutions.

(ii) relative possession of necessary competences, and relative 'success" in social action lead to the development of a more or less "competent self". The individual's past experience in his attempts to control his environment contributes to the way he approaches each new task. If he has proved efficacious, if his past efforts have produced the desired "effects", he will approach a new task with a generalized expectation of competence. If on the other hand, failure, rejection, lack of response to his efforts have been his lot, the world will be viewed as hostile, recalcitrant, immovable.

It is not only actual resources such as money, position, facility with language, personal charisma or physical strength which form a basis for the exercise of power, but also a sense of power, an image of the self as competent which acts as a lever in negotiating a more or less powerful position in relation to others.

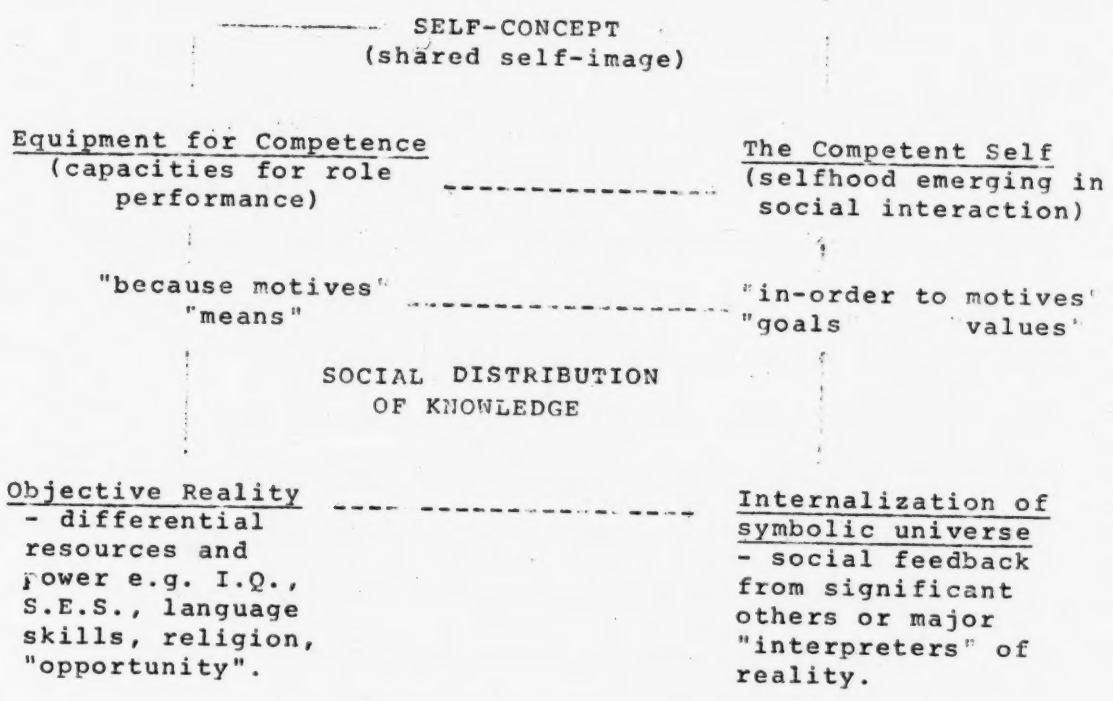



Figure 1 : Socialization and the Development of Competence

(d) Notions of "the social dsitribution of knowledge" or ignorance may be seen, then, as sub-sets of the more inclusive notion of "the social distribution of competence". This means both the skills and competences which give people the opportunity to act effectively in social situations, and the sense of power, the view of self as competent, as in control of one's own environment, that enables people to take advantage of their opportunities.

(e) The relative competence of children from different home backgrounds therefore involves both the resources, the equipment for competence necessary to be "effective" physically, socially, academically and the sense of power, the competent self-image necessary to carry through attempts at controlling the environment.

It is my contention that the education system should be seen as part, a very crucial part, of the broader processes of the social distribution of competence. The important questions to ask are: Who has access to which resources (family socio-economic and educational status, physical facilities, forms of "help" etc.)? Which groups and individuals develop which forms of competence and how? Which competences are socially most and least valued, especially within the schools? Who has access to what type of education and what are the crucial choice-points in the system which reduce a child's freedom of action? Which children will be defined as competent and which as incompetent? Does the school deny the validity of certain forms of social experience, of certain "world-views" of particular forms of competence? Is the curriculum designed to provide access for all to socially valued forms of competence, and/or to encourage "different" forms of competence?

How much sense of power are children allowed to achieve? Which children? How? Why?

My argument then, must develop along two lines. First, the "distribution" notion of education implicit in the structure of the curriculum and in such concepts as "equality of opportunity" needs more critical examination. Second, the "relational" aspects or, if you like, the inter-action process by which children develop a view of self as competent or ineffective must be built more fully into any model of home-school relationships.

Rather than review all the current literature on social background and educational aspirations and achievement, I want to look at Rehberg's (1970) characterization of the alternative models available and indicate what seem to me to be major inadequacies.

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal sequence of adolescent achievement variables supported by the research of writers such as Hyman, Strodtbeck, Sewell et al, and Rosen.

It extends the well-documented but simplistic relationship between the child's family socio-educational status and his response to schooling. These writers see

Figure 2: Temporal Sequence of Adolescent Achievement Variables as shown by Hyman, Strodtbeck, Sewell and Rosen

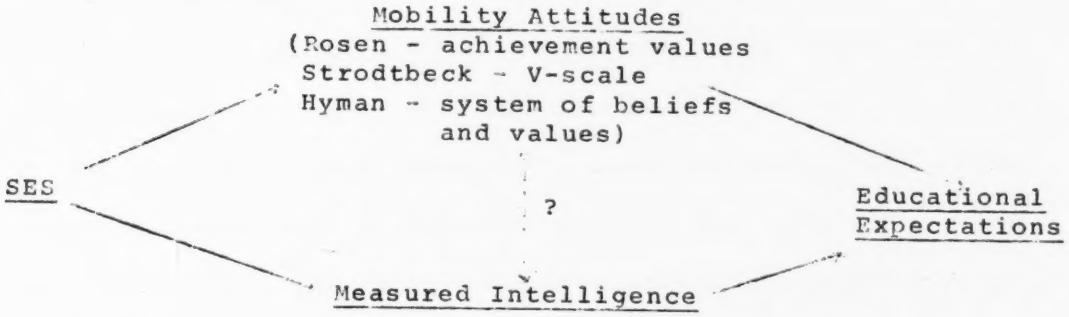
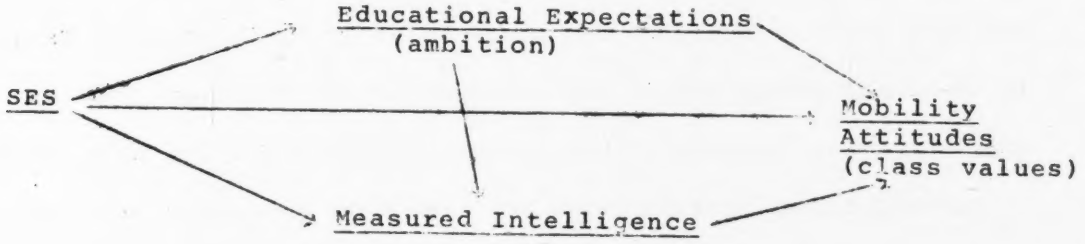



Figure 3: Temporal Sequence of Adolescent Achievement Variables as shown by Turner & Rehberg et al




both "Mobility Attitudes" (for Rosen these are achievement values, for Strodtbeck the V-scale, for Hyman the system of beliefs and values) and "Measured Intelligence" as variables which simultaneously intervene between SES and the child's educational expectations. They don't posit any directional relationship between I.Q. and Mobility Attitudes.

Figure 3 illustrates Turner's alternate model which reverses the "causal" sequence of relationships. Turner found that when one controls for "ambition" (educational expectations) there is a substantial reduction in the relationship between SES and both I.Q. and mobility attitudes (class values). In other words, Turner argues that it is not background status alone that explains class-differentiated mobility attitudes, but that "ambition" is an intervening variable which affects both the child's measured intelligence and set of values. Rehberg et al's data fit the Turner model better than that in Figure 1.

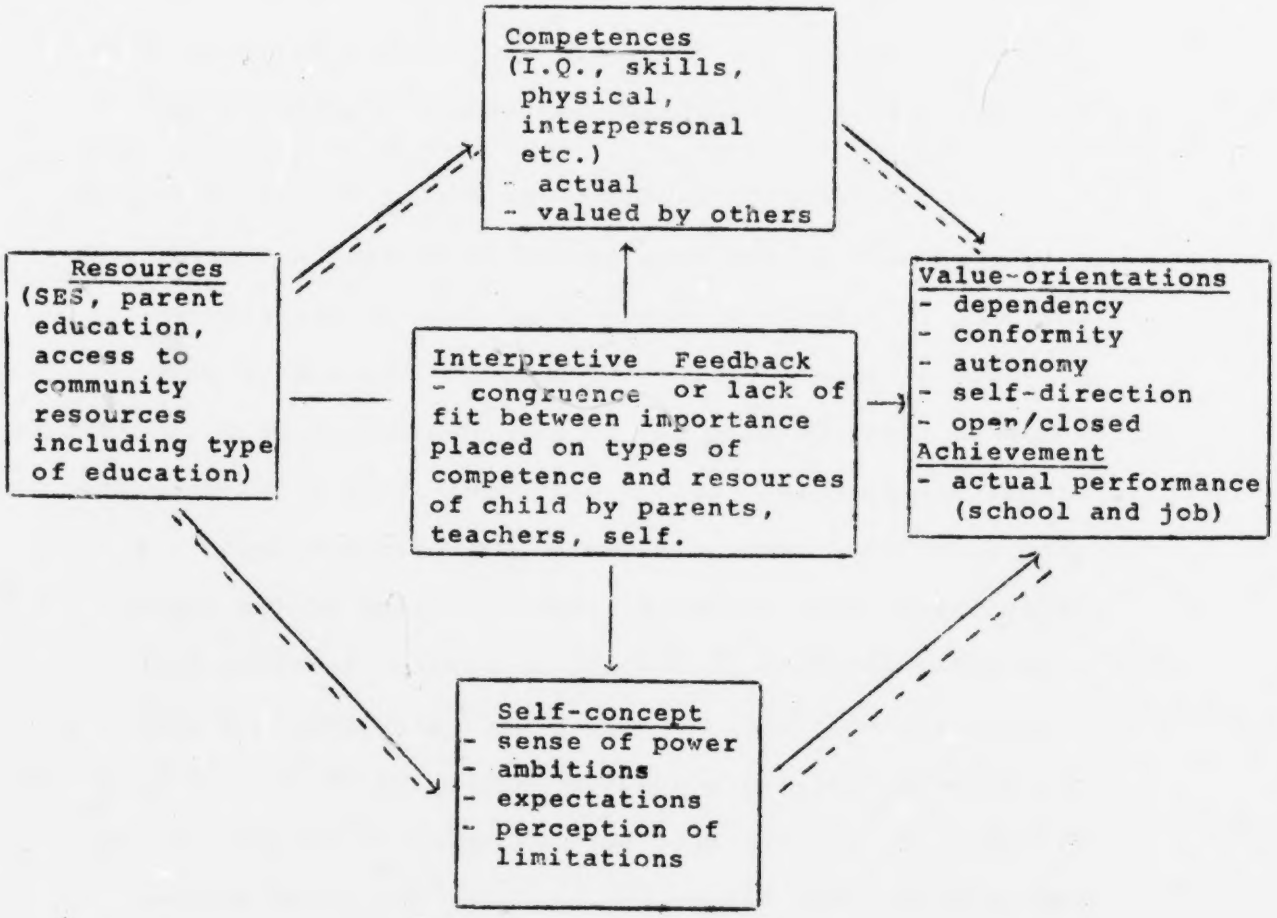
From my own theoretical perspective, both models are too static and rely too much on broad indicators. There is no clear explanation (as opposed to description) of how SES variables lead to intelligence or to mobility attitudes, or to ambitious expectations, or how they interact one with the other. Other writers of course have now begun to specify more closely how educational aspirations, expectations and achievement may be influenced by conditions such as language style (Bernstein etc.), family networks (Toomey), early signs of academic competence (Kahl), parental mobility attitudes and job dissatisfaction (Cohen), school socio-economic context (Wilson and Wallin), school religious context (Rhodes and Nam). Of particular interest are the findings of Wiseman

about the relationship between "social disorganization" and educational attainment and Coleman's finding that "sense of control" is more strongly related to achievement than most other home-related and school-related factors.

The model I want to consider is one which focuses more precisely on the dynamics of "ambition" and asks How does it arise? It attempts to look at the process by which a child's resources, types of competence and sense of power develop out of his interaction with significant others and with the world around him. The model suggests that background resources are only a starting point for differences, that feedback, interpretation of the child's particular attempts at control by parents teachers and himself are the crucial explanatory variables, and that the structure of the education system represents for many children an institutionalized de-fusing of motivation, an institutionalized dependency on those few given greater access to the social distribution of competence.

As indicated in Figure 4, the path model posits no direct connection between such broad variables as SES and achievement but suggests a kind of "lens" model

Figure 4: Competence-based model of adolescent achievement variables (Edgar, 1972)




(Hammond, 1965) through which the child's competence is interpreted for and by him.

## Institutionalized Dependency

While the process described is always an individual subjective, interpretive one as each child, from his particular background, present situation and viewpoint

develops a view of himself in relation to the wider world, it is by no means random or unpatterned.

The way in which any society functions reflects the relative strength of particular interpretations of reality and the power of certain groups to impose their own particular typifications, cognitive structuring and mystifications upon others. What we call euphemistically "the education system" is really a particular definition of the situation held by certain actors. It reflects the characteristic hierarchy of ends which they bring to the organization and the nature of their attachment to the dominant role-system. (See Silverman, p. 222)

This characteristic interpretation however becomes mystified, reified as "the" system, part of the world most people take for granted, one of the everyday assumptions by which we live. If we look back at the model suggested in Figure 4 we can indicate some of the ways in which what I have called "dependency" is built into, is institutionalized as part of an operating system, the process we call education.

Firstly, "Resources" are socially distributed in a relatively fixed way. Mobility may be possible but even that mobility reflects the dominant assumptions about which resources will be valued. The amount of money,

conversation, intellectual and political know-how available to a child from his parents is built into the economic and political institutions of society. Notice that what has been called "recipe knowledge" refers also to knowledge of one's own limits. Since that knowledge is shared by others, such recipe knowledge "permits the 'location' of individuals in society and the 'handling' of them in the appropriate manner.' The school system reflects this location and handling process in decisions about distributing finance (State Aid, types of school facilities provided, teacher numbers and qualifications,) and in decisions about the structure of education to be set up (provision of pre-schools, High versus Technical versus Private, curricular and examination regulations). The children are dependent upon those who design "the system" for the very resources they will be offered in the school.

When we look at the "Competence' variable there is further cause for alarm because we move from the purely "distributive" to the "relational" aspects of education. Which forms of competence are defined as appropriate, essential, valuable in the schools? The snotty-nosed, dirty, noisy child may not fit the teacher's image of the "ideal client". Even background resources such as the parents' economic and education levels become translated into expectations for competence and these are

institutionalized through testing procedures (Knowles and Prewitt; Rosenthal and Jacobsen), grouping practices (Yee); curriculum provisions (Charnofsky); even through counselling procedures (Kitsuse and Cicourel). Certain language styles, forms of dress and behaviour, deference patterns are favoured over others so that many children face an institutionalized de-fusing of motivation and a towering denial of any positive self-image they may be clinging to. Then examinations and tests define "success" in terms of failure for the majority and successive "weeding-out" rites of passage which, strangely enough, initiate most future members of society as failures rather than competent men and women. Patterns of power and authority favor dependence over independence, conformity over autonomy, compliance over self-initiated behaviour.

My own data on adolescent competence and educational ambitions indicates the importance of relationships rather than facilities or "objective" background characteristics.

Background "resources" variables correlate of course, as one would expect, with educational aspirations and expectations. Father's occupation level, father's

and mother's own educational achievements, family size, financial capacity and the child's age position in the family all relate to whether adolescents wish for and expect higher levels of education. But these relationships are modified through other interactional variables.

The child's perception of parental pressure to do better cuts across socio-economic levels. Whilst often those being pushed to do better are weaker academically and expect to reach lower levels of schooling, there is a very strong relationship between mother and father both pressing the child to better school achievement and higher aspirations and expectations, especially at the lower socio-economic levels. In other words, a crucial factor is not simply the parents' social status, but the value they place on the child's education.

When we look at parental feedback to the child's self-image these broad relationships can be specified further. Where fathers and mothers praise the child for academic competence, both aspirations and expectations are high; where they praise the child for physical or practical abilities, or for interpersonal competencies ambitions

are significantly lower. This correlates highly with the child's self-image of his own particular competencies and is a chicken-and egg relationship. But there are clear sex differences which suggest that both parents and teachers expect less of girls than they do of boys.*

Add to this the very strong relationship between teacher feedback and the child's ambitions and we see further how important are relationships and the images of others in forming the child's life chances. Where most teachers regard the child as "good", the child's "competent self" centres round academic strengths, with interpersonal and skill-type competencies being seen as less important. Those students who get positive feedback from their teachers aspire much higher than those who do not. Especially at the extremes of ambition (that is, where educational expectations are either extremely high or low) teacher praise has a most significant influence.

One variable which emerges as highly important in relation to the child's sense of control over his own present and future, is the encouragement of talk at mealtimes. This "mealtalk" is only slightly correlated

* See, Edgar, D.E., "Competence for Girls", The Secondary Teacher, July, 1972.

with father's occupation but relates strongly to the child's liking for mother and father, and to both aspirations and expectations. Where mealtalk is encouraged at home, adolescents have much higher educational ambitions than where it is not. Moreover, this variable relates strongly to parent-child understanding and agreement on what sort of person the child is, his or her particular abilities, occupational aims, choice of friends and even how to dress and how spare time is spent, overall major issues of parent-adolescent disagreement. Where families spend time talking things over children seem more adult than teenage oriented and see fewer limitations on their capacity to control their own lives.

The child's self-image (what we have called "the competent self") is also clearly important in affecting attitudes to education. Academic competence varies between literate and numerate abilities. Adolescents who see themselves best at literate subjects aim high but not as high as those good at maths. and science. The practically and technically competent ones aim lower. However when asked which are their weakest subjects, practical and technical inability is not seen as a handicap in reaching expectations, while literary weakness is. Those who have failed in any

subject or grade level hope for and expect much lower levels of education. Their self-image has already been damaged and parental and teacher reactions reinforce a sense of powerlessness which is hard to overcome.

The more ambitious children differ also in their orientations to life. Their world-view is in general more positive and efficacious. They see fewer limitations from circumstances outside them; they see fewer self-limitations (though girls overall blame themselves for lack of success rather than other people or blind "fate"); they are less authoritarian and conservative; less self-deprecating and more self-confident than adolescents who aspire to lower levels of education. These differences are significant for attitude scales included in the questionnaire data, but emerge most strikingly from the lengthy interviews with a subsample of students.*

What is important for the educator is to realize that the "working-class child" is motivated, in

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* The full results are being prepared for publication as Edgar, D.E. "The Conforming Adolescent", Angus & Robertson, 1973 forthcoming.

the same way as any other child to explore his environment, gain control over it and develop a sense of mastery or competence over his world. If the school environment is appropriate (in terms of providing a graduated series of experiences which will supply the child with a measure of personal success on tasks for which he is ready), and accepting (in terms of approving what the child can do rather than arousing anxieties over non-coping behaviour), then every child should be able to develop a sense of autonomy, self-esteem and competence now so much the prerogative of the middle-class child.

The community school must become a truly relational community. Migrant parents, working class parents, middle class parents need to be brought in to communication with teachers so that their aims, their purposes for their children, their views of the world are clearly understood. Schools must stop denying the validity of the child's own experiences, the validity of his family background, and must learn to start from where he is. We must reduce the "lack of fit" between teachers, parents and children.

This implies a new role for teachers and a new role for the school. The teacher's power must be reduced and students given a chance to choose their own goals and test more the limits of their own selfhood. But by this I do not mean a reduction of discipline or a curriculum based on chaos. I mean a teacher role where authority is based on knowledge and superior competence, not merely on superior status and aribtrary power. We need teachers who <u>care</u> for children but not in a sentimental, romantic fashion. Diffuse emotional attachment makes the child dependent upon the teacher, not free from him, and leaves the child helpless and lost once that teacher is gone. We need a controlled and disciplined role for teachers where every child learns to see the teacher as <u>instrumental</u> to his or her own life projects. Instead of being another obstacle to long-range goals, the teacher must design a learning environment which provides continual short-range successes for each child in his charge. The teacher should provide structure instead of anxiety. He should learn and accept cultural nuances, teach the children choice behaviour, and ensure that chosen tasks are infused with developing competencies. Above all, he must allow for the differing competencies of different

children instead of forcing them all into one path along which many are condemned to failure.

It is here that Jenck's message, with which we began, has its greatest impact. Traditional "academic" education has not been as strongly related to success in life as educators would have us believe. Narrowly defined and arbitrarily defining it merely reinforces the social distribution of competence in society's status quo.

It is here that the "community school", "the open classroom" are dangerous concepts. They don't really mean community in the sense of belonging or integration, but rather in the sense of demystifying education and its relation to what actually goes on in the community. By rejecting the pre-digested packaged curriculum and opting for the creation of relational knowledge through self-directed and communal activities, the "new" school threatens to turn out in large numbers children who are autonomous and powerful rather than dependent, who can act rather than be acted upon, who are competent in their own way instead of being confined to the narrow self-denying roles society makes available for them. The new

school takes children out of the phoney artificiality of the classroom into a still artificial but realistic involvement with the politics of experience. Their forays into the "community" will serve not only to develop their special competences in a more practical setting, but also to reveal the limits of their selfhood, to show them how stubborn are the "realities" which serve other people, to demystify the myths by which their "place" in the social structure is defined and maintained.

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# Adolescent Competence and Educational Ambition

(Detailed results, supplementary to theoretical paper). 1973.

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## Adolescent Competence and Educational Ambition

### Study Design

The sample was drawn from all 14-15 year olds attending State secondary schools in the State of Victoria, Australia, during 1971. This deliberately excluded students attending religious and other private secondary schools because it was not possible to get complete population data for them. Moreover, it was felt that the theoretical relationships being tested would not vary across school type though they might represent extremes of socio-economic status. Thus the population includes both urban and rural, technical and high schools in the State system. The random sample of 1214 students closely parallels the proportions for area, school type and sex.

Students completed in their schools a group-administered Questionnaire and verbal intelligence test (Ad.B, ACER Word Knowledge Test, Adult Form B) in July 1971. On the basis of a composite measure of what we have called "Resources" (S.E.S., parents' education level, access to facilities) a sub-sample of 100 divided into "Hi" and "Lo" was selected by

computer for more detailed interviewing. Teams of trained interviewers conducted structured interviews with each child's mother and father (separately) and a lengthy in-depth interview with the child alone. In addition, all fathers of adolescents in the sample were asked to respond to a mailed questionnaire centering around occupational situations and orientations (response rate 67.3%), and a further sub-sample of 200 students were asked to keep a detailed diary of their activities for one week in December, 1971. Coding of all open-ended responses achieved above .98 reliability.

The Adolescent Questionnaire asked about family background, parental occupational and educational status, family activities and relationships, parental and child attitudes to school and educational success, self-perceptions of competence, aspirations and expectations and areas of agreement/disagreement between child and parents. Several value-orientation scales were also included as a means of mapping broadly the "world views" of adolescents, to be explored more fully in the

interviews. Since competence was defined as both actual skills and sense of self-competence, and since we were interested to test the relations between social-structural factors and subjective orientations, we used modified versions of (a) Coleman's "Sense of Power" scale (b) Wan Sang Han's "Perception of Limitations" and "Self-Limitations" measures (c) Kohn's class value-orientation items, divided into sub-scales measuring "Authoritarianism-Conservatism", "Trustfulness", "Self-Confidence" and "Self-Deprecation". Each of these was tested to ensure satisfactory internal reliability (using Cronbach's Alpha measure) and only the "Trustfulness" sub-scale had to be discarded.

Since the theoretical perspective being adopted places great weight on individual competence and orientations as they relate to future ambitions, it was decided to split the sample into comparison groups on the basis of self-perceived competence measures. As we are dealing with adolescents at the most crucual choice-point of their educational careers, it seemed foolish to ignore the ways in which background situations and resources, past experiences

of success/failure and interpretive feedback from significant others have already built into the adolescent's world-view. One can hardly expect father's socio-economic background or educational level to be important predictors of ambition and success other than through the child's own active interpretation of his life situation and the views of others who interpret life to, for and with him.

If we find that adolescents who have different images of "the competent self" also differ significantly in a number of other ways, then we can expect that the causal pattern of variables explaining those differences will also vary. What has been done typically by researchers in this field is to take a large sample of students, test them on a variety of background factors and present attitudes,and ignore the fact that at the moment of testing children are interpreting questions differently and answering them purposively from their own self-perspective. The moment of testing is in itself a situational reflection of past events and a determinant of future actions. The child's present view of self then must be included in any

explanation of past influences or future intentions.

The evidence is very strong that the child's 'competent self' view varies systematically and reflects different patterns of variables usually used to explain sample-wide relationships. Adolescents responded to two 'competence' questions on the survey instrument. One concerned "academic competence" and asked them to list their three best and three weakest subjects. Responses were coded for combinations and then collapsed into the categories "Abstract Literate" (Languages, History, etc), "Abstract Numerate" (Maths., Science) and "Practical Technical" (Cookery, Art, Music, Shop, etc.) according to consistency for best and worst subjects. Another open-ended item asked more generally "What things are you best at/worst at?" in which they could include school work but could range beyond academic competencies. These responses form the major measure of 'the competent self" in this study and were coded into "Academic Competence", Interpersonal Competence" and "Physical/Practical Competence". Some were also coded as "All-rounders" and "Negative Competence", but as group size was

small they had to be dropped from the more complex analyses.

Students who regard themselves as best at Practical-Technical subjects are much more authoritarian-conservative than are the Abstract Literate or Numerate students (F 4-71, df 3, p.·003). This is echoed by differences between general competence groups, the most conservative being the Physical/Practical group, followed by the Academic, and least of all are those who see their greatest ability in Interpersonal competencies. The academically competent student reports fewer external limitations to his or her chances of getting ahead (F 6.99, df 4, p.·0001) and attribute self-limitations less frequently than either the physically/practically competent or the interpersonally competent ones. (F 13.3, df 4, p.·0001) Academic students are also more self-confident (especially those whose best subjects are 'numerate' i.e. science or maths.), the least self-confident ones being those whose competent self is reported as Interpersonal (getting on with people, talking, making friends etc.) (F 4.30, df 4, p.·002). When

we look at the scale measuring self-deprecation, however, those whose best subjects are 'Abstract Literate' score higher even than the 'Practical Technical' best subject group, the 'Abstract Numerate' students being much less self-deprecating on this measure (F 5.37, df 3, p.·001) This distinction is reflected too for the general competence measure, where it is the 'Interpersonal' competence group that scores highest on self-deprecation, and the Physical/Practical group higher than the Academic (which now includes both Literate and Numerate skills). On the Coleman Sense of Power scale the groups differ in the same way but not significantly for general competence, and it is the Practical/ Technical and Literate best subject groups which report a lower sense of control over their environment than the Numerate group (F 4.33, df 3, p.·005). And finally, on our measure of verbal intelligence, it is the Literate subject group that scores highest, followed by the Numerate and, much lower, the Practical/Technical group. (F 9.03, df 3, p.·0001). Similarly, on general competence, the Physical/ Practical ones score lower on verbal ability than do the Interpersonal and the (much higher) Academic students.

In sum, then, we can say that adolescents who see their "competent self" as lying in different spheres of ability differ significantly on several other major dimensions. The academically competent generally have positive orientations towards life and towards themselves - they are self-confident, not self-deprecating, have a higher sense of power and are less authoritarian-conservative than other adolescents. It seems to be those gifted in maths.-science areas who are the most positively oriented of all. On the other hand adolescents who say they are best at physical sports or practical-manual skills seem to view the world as more hostile, presenting obstacles to their life-chances; they also blame themselves for not being smart enough to succeed, and are more self-deprecating, less self-confident and, as a group, more accepting of adult authority and more resistant to change. Those classified as interpersonally competent emerge as something like the 'other-directed' stereotype, being lowest in sense of power and self-confidence, highly self-deprecating, attributing limitations to their own failings rather than blaming external factors.

If we are to examine the ambitions of such adolescents then we must not expect the same sets of factors to explain their aspirations and expectations, for their life situations have produced both differing equipment for competent performance, and differing views of "the competent self".

Our basic comparison groups then are adolescents classified as "Academically Competent" (439), "Interpersonally Competent" (183) and "Physically-Practically Competent" (484).

From the preliminary analyses of variance we selected those variables most strongly related to educational ambitions. Here we relied on the distinction made by Wan Sang Han between "aspirations" and "expectations". What he calls wishes, levels of hoped-for educational achievement do not relate as strongly to socio-economic background as do expectations, the more realistic assessment of one's life chances. We take the position that expectations are a better measure of ambition because they reflect a self-prediction

in light of, and often in spite of, perceived limitations to achieving what is hoped for. In this Australian sample we found a large cohort of what could be called "reluctant attenders", that is, adolescents who wish for less education than they actually expect to achieve. This group is under pressure from parents to stay on at school but is less motivated and less self-confident than others. Thus to use "expectations" as a measure of ambition seems more useful because it includes parental and others' expectations and despite reluctance in some students reflects their level of 'aimed at' achievement.

Using stepwise regression analysis for each of the three competence groups separately indicates the differential effects of key variables on educational expectations. For this purpose we entered seven variables together in the first step (Sex, Father Occupation, Father Education, Mealtalk, School Type and I.Q.) as basic background "Resources". Other variables were then sorted stepwise as they added to the explained variance

Table 1 : Stepwise Regression Summary Table for Academic Competence Group - Educational Expectations.

| Variable | Multiple R | R Square | R Square Change | Simple R |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. "Resources" | .379 | .144 | - | - |
| 2. Perceived Limits | .446 | .199 | .055 | .305 |
| 3. Self-Limitations | .477 | .277 | .028 | -.315 |
| 4. Teacher Feedback | .493 | .243 | .016 | .209 |
| 5. Self-Deprecation | .505 | .255 | .012 | -.082 |
| 6. Mother Affect | .510 | .261 | .005 | .027 |
| 7. Previous Failure | .515 | .266 | .005 | -.204 |
| 8. Father Affect | .518 | .269 | .003 | .111 |
| 9. Authoritarianism | .521 | .272 | .003 | -.144 |
| 10. Self-Confidence | .523 | .274 | .002 | .168 |
| 11. Parent Pressure | .524 | .274 | .000 | .021 |

Table 2 : Stepwise Regression Summary Table for Interpersonal Competence Group - Educational Expectations

| Variable | Multiple R | R Square | R Square Change | Simple R |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. "Resources" | .412 | .170 | - | - |
| 2. Teacher Feedback | .468 | .219 | .049 | .238 |
| 3. Authoritarianism | .508 | .258 | .039 | -.233 |
| 4. Previous Failure | .532 | .283 | .025 | -.254 |
| 5. Self-Confidence | .552 | .305 | .022 | .209 |
| 6. Sense of Power | .562 | .316 | .011 | .213 |
| 7. Father Affect | .569 | .325 | .009 | .068 |
| 8. Self-Deprecation | .573 | .328 | .003 | -.054 |
| 9. Parent Pressure | .574 | .329 | .001 | .056 |
| 10. Mother Affect | .575 | .331 | .002 | .038 |
| 11. Perceived Limits | .575 | .331 | .000 | .153 |

Table 3: Stepwise Regression Summary Table for Physical-Practical Competence Group - Educational Expectations

| Variable | Multiple R | R Square | R Square Change | Simple R |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. "Resources" | .338 | .115 | - | - |
| 2. Teacher Feedback | .416 | .173 | .058 | .228 |
| 3. Perceived Limits | .456 | .208 | .035 | .280 |
| 4. Previous Failure | .481 | .231 | .023 | -.259 |
| 5. Self-Limitations | .489 | .239 | .008 | -.231 |
| 6. Father Affect | .493 | .243 | .004 | .106 |
| 7. Parent Pressure | .494 | .244 | .001 | .112 |
| 8. Sense of Power | .495 | .245 | .001 | .174 |
| 9. Self-Deprecation | .496 | .246 | .001 | -.125 |
| 10. Authoritarianism | .497 | .247 | .001 | .138 |
| 11. Self-Confidence | .497 | .247 | .000 | .148 |

in educational expectations. Table 1 gives the summary table for the Academic Competence group. Table 2 for the Interpersonal Competence group and Table 3 for the Physical-Practical Competence group.

Tables 1, 2, 3 here

The data have not yet been subjected to full path analysis, so our interpretation of these results must be careful, but there seem again to be clear differences in the patterns of relationships for each competence group.

For those adolescents who see their greatest area of competence to lie in "Academic", school-related skills, the "Resources" variables explain 14.4% of the variance in educational expectations. A large 5.5% jump is related to the extent they feel family background limits their life chances, that is, perceived rather than actual limitations in the form of parent income or measured I.Q. Self-blame, in the form of perceived self-limitations (2.8%) and self-deprecation, feelings of uselessness (1.2%) is also clearly another

contributing factor to reduced ambitions, as is feedback from teachers (1.6%). Previous failure affects ambition little once these variables have been controlled for (Partial Correlation after Step 5 is -·079 cf. Simple R of -·204).

In marked contrast is the pattern for the Interpersonal Competence group. Here background Resources explain more of the initial variance (17.0%) in educational expectations, but then neither perceived limits nor self-blame enter into the equation. It is teacher feedback (whether students feel most teachers regard them as good or poor students) that adds another 4.9%; and then their own conservatism (as measured by Kohn's Authoritarianism - Conservatism scale) that adds another 3.9% to the explained variance. Previous failure also adds significantly (2.5%) and the more positive measures of self confidence (2.2%) and sense of power (1.1%) contribute significantly also.

Those adolescents who see their abilities lying in physical sports or manual-practical skills are closer to the "Interpersonal" group than to the

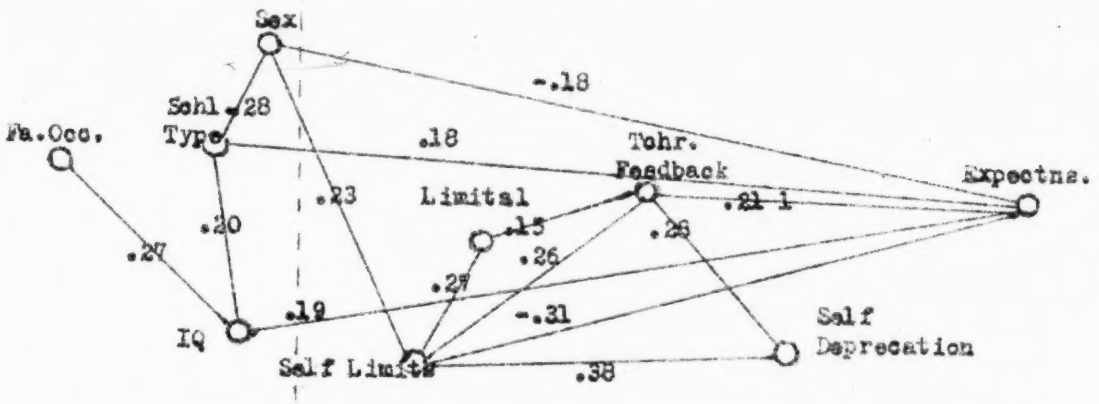
"Academic". Note that despite the fact that many of this "Physical-Practical" group come from lower-income, less well-educated family backgrounds, the combined "Resources" variable accounts for less of the variance in expectations (11.5%) than for either of the other groups. Again it seems to be positive or negative feedback from teachers that makes the greatestdifference (5.8%), but then perceived rather than actual limitations of the family background enter in (3.5%). Previous failure in courses or grade levels also enters into the equation strongly (2.3%) and then their own feelings of self-limitations (0.8%) and their affective relations with father (0.4%) enter in significantly but slightly.

In order to give a tentative picture of the relationships between variables for each competence group (later to be analysed by means of path analysis) the following diagrams use simple intercorrelation coefficients. We have omitted for the sake of simplicity all correlations lower than .15.

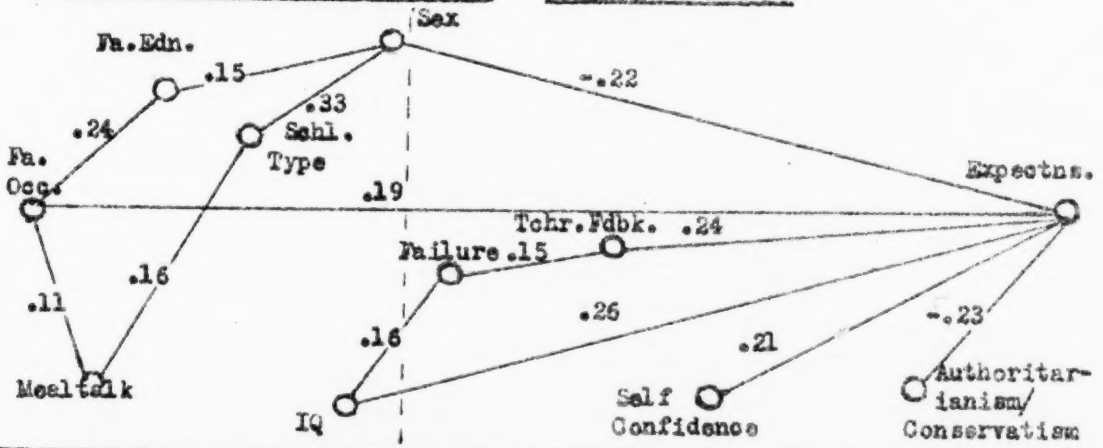
Figure 1 here

FIGURE 1.

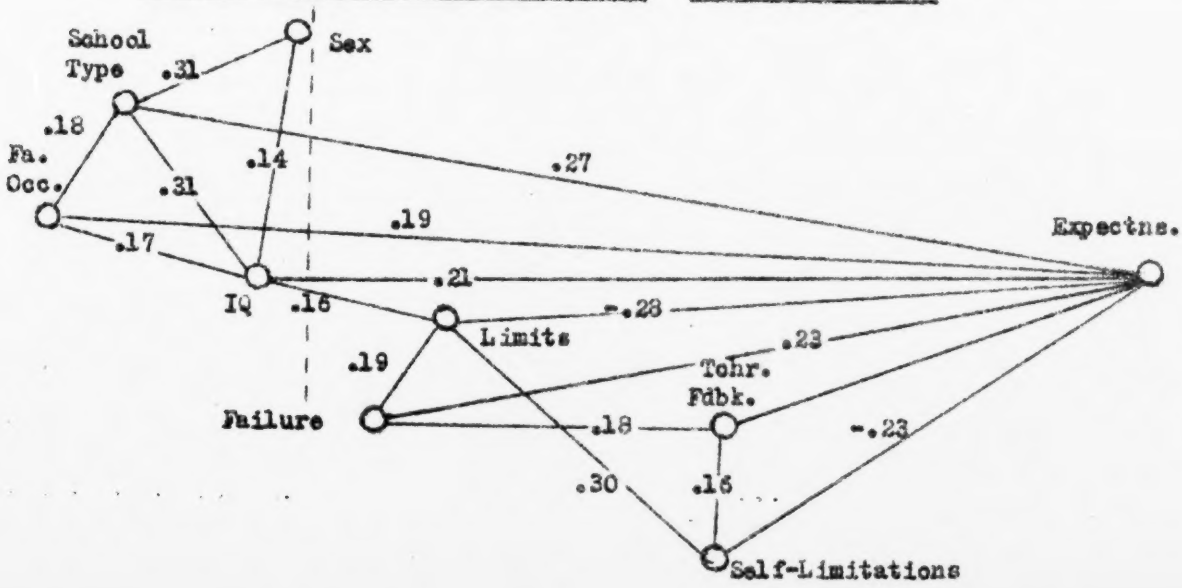
Academic Competence Group - Intercorrelations




Interpersonal Competence Group - Intercorrelations




Physical-Practical Competence Group - Intercorrelations



Father's occupation has, overall, only weak direct links with educational ambition. For adolescents with an 'Academic' self-image it works indirectly through intelligence; for the 'Interpersonal' groupthrough father's education level and sex; and for the 'Physical Practical' group through both intelligence and school type.

Sex was one of the "Resources" variables and exerts differing effects for each group. For the academically competent, sex seems to operate both directly and indirectly on educational ambition; being a girl increases her perception of self-limitations which in turn reduces her expectation level, and it reduces expectations directly as well. For the interpersonally competent sex seems more strongly linked to other resources variables and then operates directly rather than through other measures to reduce ambition. For the physical-practical group however sex has already exerted its effect on school type selection (many of these students having already chosen technical rather than high school education) and operates only indirectly on expectations through

both school type and I.Q.

Intelligence as measured here also operates differently for the three groups. For the Academic group it works indirectly through the student's perception of limitations. Limitations are linked through teacher feedback to perceived self-limitations and self-deprecation. the self limitations measure having the strongest direct effect of all variables on educational ambition (-·31). For the interpersonally competent, intelligence operates separately from the other 'Resources' variables. That is it relates directly to expectations (.26) and indirectly through previous failure and teacher feedback. In contrast intelligence is strongly linked to 'Resources' such as Father Occupation, Sex and School Type for the Physical-Practical competence group. It exerts a strong direct effect on expectations (.21) but on even stronger effect through perceived limitations and self-limitations.

The clusters of feedback and value orientations are also interestingly varied. Perceived

limitations, Teacher Feedback and Self-Deprecation are closely interrelated in the Academic group, but the limitations variables do not appear for the Interpersonal students. Instead Self-Confidence and the measure of Authoritarianism-Conservatism relate independently to expectations. It is experience of Previous Failure that links up I.Q. and Teacher Feedback for them. And it is Previous Failure for the Physical-Practical group that links the perceived limitations variables and Teacher Feedback.

In sum, what seems to be indicated is that the adolescent's view of his own competence, already developed on the basis of past life experience, does affect the ordering of variables that might explain educational expectations. It alters not only the potential effect of 'objective' resources as traditionally used in research on this topic, but also the potential effect of their particular value-orientations in dampening or enhancing educational ambitions. It is worth noting that children who see themselves as academically gifted are less affected by background 'objective'

factors than they are by their own self-views. If, despite their professed academic competence, they get negative feedback from teachers and feel limited by their own self-doubts, educational ambition can be greatly reduced.

The 'Physical-Practical' competence group also seems to be strongly influenced by teacher feedback and perceived limitations, but their realistic assessment of self-competence seems already to have influenced their choice of school so that this exerts a more definite influence on their expectations. Once in a technical secondary school the educational "career" is clearly fixed in certain paths, most of them not (until very recently) leading to higher education. It is the interpersonally competent adolescents who seem most puzzling. Intelligence appears to operate on expectations separately from the other background resources factors: and perceived limitations, either external or self, do not have any strong effect.

It will be necessary in later analyses to check alternate 'causal' paths for each competence group to enable more final statements to be made

about such relationships. But enough perhaps has been shown to indicate the need for analyses of the relationships between background situations and present orientations to education to take a more dynamic view of their interrelationship. By partialling out the major differences in self-reported competence and using these as our comparison groups it has been possible to suggest how important is the "competent self" over and above the adolescent's actual "equipment for competence". As argued in the introductory theoretical section of this paper, it is both the skills and competencies which give people the opportunity to act effectively in social situations, and the view of self as competent, in various ways, that enables people to take advantage of their opportunities.